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**Portfolio Holder Report - Lezley Picton:
Culture, Leisure, Waste and Communications**

Responsible Officer:

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1.0 Summary

This report provides an overview of the activity and outcomes for the Portfolio for Culture, Leisure, Waste and Communications, and allows the Portfolio Holder to inform Council of key areas of work and issues for the council.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Full Council accept the contents of this report and recognises the varied scope of works and achievements delivered.

REPORT

3.0 WASTE MANAGEMENT

- 3.1 Shropshire Councils waste management services are provided through a 27-year PFI Integrated Contract with Veolia Environmental Services Shropshire which covers collection, transport, treatment and disposal of municipal waste. The contract began in 2007. As a review document this focusses on key performance issues and activity during the last year. The impact of Covid-19 and the actions taken to manage the crisis are covered briefly as this situation is constantly evolving.

3.2 Recycling and Composting Rate

Waste Performance data for England in 2018/19 was released in November. This showed Shropshire's recycling and composting rate as 55.5%, ranking 38th out of 345 authorities in England. This is an increase of 1.4 percentage points on the figure for 2017/18, mainly due to increased composting.

3.3 **Collections**

The collection service is in three parts, refuse, dry recycling (paper, glass, metals and plastics), and compostable waste, all provided on a fortnightly basis to around 140,000 properties. In total there are approximately 10.9 million collections made in the county each year. There were 1830 missed collections in 2019, which is the equivalent of 1 miss for every 5,900 completed.

- 3.4 Veolia introduced their new collections management system, ECHO in 2018. It includes links to an in-cab system on all collection vehicles which has improved communications with their depots, the Councils Customer Service Centre (CSC) and the Waste Management Unit. Combined with increased use of the 360-degree cameras fitted to collection vehicles this has significantly improved resolution times for missed collections and reduced the time needed to resolve complaints and queries related to the service.

- 3.5 The kerbside collections of refuse, recycling and compostable waste continued as normal through March, April and May. This was achieved by significant use of agency staff and drivers brought in from Veolia's commercial arm to provide back up to the regular staff. Despite this, the number of missed collections on all rounds remained low.

- 3.6 Additional refuse and recycling vehicles were introduced where needed as a result of a significant increase in the quantity of both waste streams. Overall there was an increase of around 15% in the weight of refuse collected and a 20% increase in recycling tonnage. It should be noted that there was no loss of Residual Waste or Green collections during the peak of COVID-19, which reflects on the joint work of Shropshire Council and Veolia staff during this period.

- 3.7 The contract also includes a Bulky Collection service which removes large items direct from properties on request. There is a charge for this service starting at £35 for up to 3 items. There were 2234 collections of this type in 2019. The service was suspended at the end of March and is scheduled to re-start in the week commencing 6th July.

3.8 **In-Vessel Composting**

Both Shropshire Council and Veolia have continued to search for land suitable for the construction of an In-Vessel Composting (IVC) facility. This would enable the food and garden waste collections to be extended countywide. Currently, properties in the former Oswestry and Bridgnorth districts (about 30% of the total) cannot put food waste in their garden waste bins.

- 3.9 When collected by itself garden waste can be processed outdoors in what is called an open-windrow process. The enclosed nature of an IVC means that the temperature of the material can be raised and monitored to ensure that food waste can also be composted in a safe and legal manner.

- 3.10 The aim is to construct a plant capable of processing 50,000 tonnes of food and garden waste per year. Several sites are currently being evaluated before a formal planning application is submitted.

3.11 Bring Banks

Following a public consultation, the Bring Bank recycling service ended in June 2019 as part of a package of measures to establish a balanced budget for 2019/20. The aim was to make savings while minimising the impact on the overall service as there were established alternatives for householders in terms of kerbside recycling collections which offered environmental benefits over the bring bank system.

- 3.12 The withdrawal of the service achieved a saving of £19,750 per month. The consultation highlighted two main concerns amongst respondents, that of an increase in fly-tipping and a fall in recycling tonnages. Suitable mitigation has ensured that to date neither issue has arisen. The loss of Bring Bank recycling tonnage has been offset by the expected increase in kerbside collected material. The number of fly tipping incidents in the six months following removal of the Bring Banks was consistently below the level recorded in the previous year.

3.13 Household Recycling Centres (HRC's)

Shropshire Council and Veolia operate 5 HRCs in the county where residents can bring their household waste for recycling or disposal. These can be found in Shrewsbury, Whitchurch, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, and Craven Arms and together they have received around 35,500 tonnes of waste in the last year.

Over 30 different waste streams are segregated for recycling at each site with an average 56 % recycling and composting rate, excluding soil and rubble. They also act as transfer stations for the waste brought in by the collection service as well as 1,200 tonnes of litter and 4,700 tonnes of road sweepings from the Councils Street Cleansing Contractor Kier.

All HRCs were closed on Weds 25th March in response to lockdown restrictions. The sites were successfully reopened on Tuesday 5th May following new site rules on social distancing, support from SC Highways and Community Enforcement Officers, and a comprehensive communications plan.

3.14 Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) at Battlefield

Around 68,600 tonnes of Shropshire's residual waste was processed at the ERF in the last 12 months. The main outputs from the plant are electricity, enough to power 10,000 homes via the national grid, and ash, which is recycled via use as an aggregate in the construction industry. The plant is one of the most efficient in the UK, with an availability of 95% in 2019, exporting 58,000 MWh of electricity.

3.15 Waste Minimisation

Over the last 6 months the Waste Management Unit has increased efforts significantly to promote waste minimisation and reduction. Historically this concept had been challenging to promote beyond the already very environmentally aware segment of our community. However, recent media coverage on issues like single use plastics has engaged individuals and

communities and a growing appetite is evident with many more wanting to take steps to reduce their waste and impact upon the environment.

3.16 Recognising the small size of the Waste Team and its limited resource, effort has focussed on establishing or re-establishing links with the grass roots individuals and networks active in this field. Acknowledging that whilst limited in what direct action could be delivered, it was important to be visibly engaged and be able to signpost others.

3.17 Since embarking on this programme of work an action plan has been created and worked to; we have pooled collective knowledge and examined our performance and promoted the following initiatives;

- Water refill app and locations,
- reuse and loan facilities for seasonal festivities of Halloween and Christmas
- home composting
- and met and forged links with Shrewsbury's Food Hub and Environment Centre and community project, the Ashley Street Collective.

3.18 Our use of social media has increased to assist promoting the waste minimisation message. This has included a refresh of a waste themed Council newsletter, a new Twitter account, and jointly managing the Shropshire Recycles Facebook page with Veolia's PR and Communications Team.

3.19 Looking Ahead

The Waste Management Unit have been working on two projects with the Digital Transformation Team. A portal to increase self-service options for waste services, including reporting missed collections and requests for container replacement, was scheduled for May 2020, this has been delayed by the impact of Covid 19. A project to replace the current paper permits used to access the Household Recycling Centres with a digital version on smartphones was intended to launch in June, again delayed by Covid-19, it is hoped that this new system will be launched in the autumn.

3.20 The Environment Bill, including measures to implement the national Resources & Waste Strategy, began its progress through Parliament in 2019. Shropshire Council responded to consultations on the strategy. A further phase of consultations was expected in 2020. However, the disruption of the legislative programme due to Covid-19 will see significant slippage in the planned timetable.

4.0 CULTURE, LEISURE AND TOURISM

4.1 Changes have been made to the way in which Culture, Leisure and Tourism Services will be delivered. Libraries, tourism, leisure, sport and physical activity, museums, heritage and arts, archives services and the theatre and old market hall have all been brought together in one new Culture, Leisure and Tourism Service with effect from 1st February 2020.

4.2 A new Head of Service has been appointed to lead the delivery of the Council's priorities through continued development and improvement of the service and through increasing participation by our communities and visitors in the wide range of opportunities that exist across Shropshire.

4.3 A new Visitor Economy Post has also been created to support the development of tourism across Shropshire, with the successful candidate commencing work with the Council in June 2020.

4.4 **Cultural Strategy**

The Council have been working with partners to develop a Shropshire Council area Cultural Strategy which will underpin the way in which Cultural organisations work together to develop and promote Shropshire's unique cultural offer. The stakeholders involved include national and regional organisations, voluntary, private and public sector partners and includes arts, museums, heritage, sport and physical activity, libraries, play, creative industries, open spaces, parks, AONB and archives. The draft strategy will be out for consultation later this year.

4.5 **Leisure Review**

A review of leisure services resulted in the Council taking over the management of Bishops Castle and Church Stretton Leisure Centres from 1st April 2020. A review and update of the Leisure Facilities Strategy and the development of a Sport and Physical Activity Strategy is underway to inform the future priorities and strategic direction for the service.

4.6 A management options appraisal is also underway to assess the options for managing Shropshire's leisure centres in the future. This will investigate the optimum delivery mechanism for all sites and provide a clear direction for a sustainable way forward, taking into account the impact of COVID -19. It will assess the sites taking into account the remaining length of the current main leisure centre contract and the sites currently managed directly by Shropshire Council.

4.7 **Shrewsbury Swimming Project**

Sport England supported a piece of work to develop an outline pre-feasibility piece of work on swimming provision in Shrewsbury. A report was completed and approved by Cabinet in February. The piece of work focussed on the Quarry site and included:

- Assessing land options, suitability, ownership accessibility
- Suitability of the site itself and planning issues
- Ability of the site to deliver the services identified in the Council's vision for swimming in Shrewsbury
- Ability of the site to enhance the public realm and stimulate economic regeneration whilst contributing to social and community regeneration

- The financial sustainability of the facility, its potential to attract new users alongside its potential for partnership working and shared service provision working with other leisure, educational, healthcare and community partners
- 4.8 A further, more detailed piece of feasibility work will be commissioned and undertaken this year. The options to be considered include building all facilities on one site at the Quarry, or a 'leisure' type facility on the Quarry site and a competition style pool at the Sports Village, Sundorne site. Each of these options will be considered in the feasibility study.
- 4.9 **Playing Pitch Strategy**
The development of a new Playing Pitch Strategy is underway and is likely to be concluded by September 2020. This will inform the future development and investment priorities for the Council and inform the Local Plan.
- 4.10 **Impact of Covid -19**
The Coronavirus pandemic is having a considerable impact on Culture, Leisure and Tourism services with the closure of Libraries, Leisure Centres, Museum services, Theatre and Old Market Hall, golf course and initially parks and open spaces.
- 4.11 The financial impact on income levels has been and continues to be significant due to the ongoing closure or part closures of leisure centres and theatres.

The impact of Covid-19 on Culture, Leisure, Tourism according to the Period 2 projections for 2021 are as follows:

Old Market Hall & Theatre Severn	£1.8M
Other CL&T	£3.0M
Delay of savings plans	£0.1M
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>£4.9M</u>

- 4.12 The emergency has also provided the services with the opportunity to rethink ways in which we work and how services should be delivered in the future. We are focusing on the development of digital services and outdoor activities, cross service working and better collaboration across Directorates, as well as within Culture Leisure and Tourism. We are also considering how we can support community led local service delivery in line with the new Community and Rural Strategy.
- 4.13 **Community Reassurance Teams**
The closure of facilities also provided the opportunity for many of the Culture Leisure and Tourism staff to get involved in the development of the Community Reassurance Teams and Emergency Food Hub.

4.14 Culture, Leisure and Tourism staff from Libraries, Leisure, Theatres, Outdoor Partnerships and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership have been central to the development of the Community Reassurance Team and the Emergency Food Hub, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the Community Reassurance Teams (CRT) is to work with the community and address any gaps in provision, to ensure that all community groups and people in Shropshire receive the help and support that they need to stay at home and stay well during the crisis.

4.15 The team has done this by identifying vulnerable people in the community, understanding and facilitating the community response to meet people's needs, and by identifying and filling gaps in provision when needed. As part of this, members of the Outdoor Partnerships team led and managed the Emergency Food Hub, delivering food parcels to those identified as 'Shielded' as defined by Central Government and to those who were unable to source or fund food for themselves. Library staff did phone back calls for all those receiving food parcels.

- Over 600 volunteer organisations and businesses have been collated on a new Community Volunteering Directory that is being shared internally and on the SC website
- 218 referrals and welfare checks have been co-ordinated
- Over 2,120 people have benefited from food parcels deliveries.
- 48 PPE deliveries to staff
- 842 meals delivered for the homeless
- 818 phone calls to those who received food parcels

4.16 **Libraries**

4.17 Library services development has also been driven by the Council's Corporate priorities as well as feedback from our communities, library users, and the Universal Offers set nationally by Libraries Connected. In Health and Well-being, Shropshire Libraries is emerging as a key player regarding social prescribing with influence at regional and national levels. The Shared Memory Bags project has been extended and acknowledged as an exemplar of good practice in tackling dementia, with one of the team shortlisted for a national award.

4.18 The Human Library has continued to challenge stereotypes and discrimination within communities. Other library authorities across the country are now following this lead and setting up their own versions. The Summer Reading Challenge, for children and young people, has been very successful engaging over 2,800 children who borrowed 43,000 books. The Arts Award scheme in libraries has enabled 85 young people to develop their creativity and gain a recognised qualification, working in partnership with schools and Home Educated groups. Through the nationally funded Bookstart initiative and working with a wide range of partner organisations 12,250 Early Years books worth £121,000 were gifted.

- 4.19 To reflect changing needs and digital developments our e-book and e-audio services have grown, use of these has increased by 37% on the previous year. A strong focus has been maintained around developing the Libraries team. Over 80 staff attended Away Days with the theme of 'meeting future needs'. Frontline staff have also been introduced to a new project to collect and map evidence that demonstrates the range of positive impacts that library services deliver.
- 4.20 As part of strategic development a range of public and staff engagement activities were carried out. These captured views from over 1,300 individuals, feeding directly into the draft library strategy. The library service underwent an LGA Peer Challenge that recognised a strong and vibrant service while also highlighting opportunities for further development. Shropshire Libraries staff via the LGA, was part of an Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review team working in Lincolnshire, bringing back valuable learning for Shropshire.
- 4.21 Whilst library buildings have been closed since 23rd March through the COVID -19 lockdown and will be reopening with a phased approach from 4th July, the service has taken the opportunity to fast track the provision of digital and electronic services during this period and will continue to progress as the remaining services reopen. The impact has seen:-
- almost as many new users in the first three months than all of last year
 - more than half of last year's e-book issues in three months
 - almost half of last year's e-audio issues in three months
 - more requests in the last three months than all of last year.

4.22 **Theatre Severn and Old Market Hall**

- 4.23 Theatre Severn and the Old Market Hall saw combined annual attendance of over 250,000 for the third consecutive year, as audiences enjoyed highlights including hit musicals *Cabaret* and *Buddy*, and acclaimed drama such as *The Girl on the Train* and *An Inspector Calls*. Theatre Severn also hosted another record breaking pantomime season as more than 42,000 people attended the latest production, *Aladdin*, including nearly 12,000 local school children. Alongside the pantomime, the theatre introduced a new 'Relaxed Space', to enable audiences who find the live environment and special effects overwhelming to enjoy the show in a more comfortable setting, and this received hugely positive feedback.
- Theatre Severn and Old Market Hall have been closed since the end of March due to Covid-19 and sadly there is no planned date for the reopening of these facilities.

4.24 **Arts**

Thirty professional arts organisations and festivals from across Shropshire have been successful in securing funding from the Arts Grants scheme for 2019/20. The grants support the organisations to deliver a regular high-quality

programme of arts activity which meets council priorities and supports the delivery of the Arts Strategy. In 2019/20 the total investment of £24,550 will help lever more than three million pounds of external earned income into the county, 10,113 artists will be employed, the programmes will engage 31,297 participants and attract audiences of 541,950.

4.25 Arts Grants Review

The grant scheme has been updated in 2020/21 in order to continue the council's vital support for the arts sector and ensure the £25,000 investment has the most impact. From March 2020 the Council will no longer be providing small scale grants, funding will be invested into the arts sector through a larger scale grant programme. The new programme has been designed in response to feedback from the sector. Arts organisations and festivals will be invited to apply for one of five grants, with a value of £5,000 each. The criteria reflects the new draft Cultural Strategy and other council priorities and was launched in March 2020, with deadlines for applications August 2020.

- 4.26 A key criteria, alongside delivering high quality arts activity, will be for applicants to work in partnership with other arts organisations and festivals in the county and with Shropshire Council Cultural Services.

4.27 Funding to Support Children and Young People with SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities) and their Families

CCS (Culture Consortium Shropshire), and Action Consortium (Energize, Parent & Carers Council and ignition), have secured funding from Arts Connect, which is being matched by a range of other partners, to deliver a three-year programme for children and young people with SEND. This programme has been developed from research, commissioned by Shropshire Council, showing that children and young people currently accessing activity through the 'All In' programme would like opportunities to participate in a broader range of activity particularly in arts and culture.

- 4.28 The aim of the programme is to enable children and young people aged 0 to 19 with SEND and their families to take part in more and better-quality Arts and Cultural activities.

4.29 Emergency Arts Grants - COVID -19

In response to the current Coronavirus crisis, Shropshire Council is providing emergency grant funding for arts organisations, venues and festivals in the county.

- 4.30 The aim of the funding is to support arts organisations during May to November, to develop and deliver digital and online programmes of work and continue to engage with user groups, communities, participants and audiences in a virtual way.

- 4.31 23 organisations have been awarded funding which equates to £1,000 per organisation from Shropshire Council. This in turn will assist the arts organisations and festivals to secure up to £580,717 in total to support their emergency projects for delivery of arts activities during the Covid pandemic period.

4.32 **Museums Service**

The discovery of a rare Bronze Age object in Shropshire by a metal detector user has been the catalyst for a significant partnership between the British Museum and Shropshire Museums Service. The Bulla, or Shropshire Sun Pendant as it will be known, is a masterpiece of European Bronze Age gold work and evidence of the importance of the sun and cosmology during the period. The pendant was acquired by the British Museum for £250,000 with help from the Art Fund and the American Friends of the British Museum and will be lent to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery for its first public display in November 2020. With support from Friends groups and funders, Shropshire Museums are in the process of acquiring a hoard of exceptional objects found alongside the Sun Pendant. Negotiations with the British Museums have led to the submission of a draft partnership agreement to the British Museum's senior leadership team and trustees for the creation of a major pre-history partnership gallery at SM&AG. Our shared aspiration is that the new gallery will immerse visitors in the rich and varied Bronze Age material discovered at the wetland find-spot where the Sun Pendant and other objects were deposited, seemingly as religious offerings. It has the potential to highlight the religious and cultural importance of watery locales during this period and explore the ways in which past communities experienced and interacted with their natural world.

4.33 **Shropshire Archives**

Friends of Shropshire Archives Conservation Appeal - Life of Sir Philip Sidney by Fulke Greville

The Friends of Shropshire Archives appeal for funding to conserve the manuscript of the life of Sir Philip Sidney by Fulke Greville achieved its target in early 2020. Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) was one of Elizabeth I's preeminent courtiers. A scholar, poet and soldier, he died at the age of 31 at the battle of Zutphen in the Netherlands. The unique manuscript requires urgent conservation work to prevent it deteriorating further. The ink used in the volume is acidic and is literally eating away the paper it is written on. We are very grateful to everyone who contributed to the appeal.

4.34 **David Evans Stained Glass Cartoons**

Shropshire Archives holds a small but important collection of large-scale cartoons, or working drawings, produced by the stained-glass artist David Evans (1793-1861) whose work can be found in churches across Wales and Shropshire. The cartoons are in very poor condition and require urgent conservation work. Shropshire Archives has been awarded £9,800 in grant

funding from the National Conservation Manuscripts Trust to work on these unique items.

Work will start on these two conservation projects once Shropshire Archives reopens.

4.35 On-line resources

On-line resources have been enhanced during the year following work by staff and volunteers. The on-line catalogue at www.shropshirearchives.org.uk now includes over 500,000 records including over 70,000 images. Highlights of the resources catalogued this year include:

- Records of Radbrook College, Shrewsbury
- Records of the More and Hope-Edwards family of Linley Hall
- Photographs by Ted Pickin of Bucknall
- Records of the Owen family of Shrewsbury and North Wales
- Print and drawing collections

4.36 Country Parks

4.37 Northern Parks

In northern Shropshire there are 15 sites covering 330 hectares of land, attracting well over half a million visitors a year. Over the last year the number of sites under 10 year countryside stewardship has increased to 7. This equates to funding of £200K over the 10 year period enabling us to manage these sites for people and wildlife, some of which are sites of special scientific interest, regionally important geological sites and internationally important RAMSAR wetland sites.

4.38 Walkmill Meadows, Market Drayton's only area of accessible wild greenspace has been secured with a new 10-year lease with Severn Trent Water and financial support from Severn Trent Water of £120K over that period. This has enabled greater involvement with the Town Council and local people and given rise to increased participation and local ownership of this site.

4.39 Nesscliffe hillfort – 2019 was a summer of archaeological discovery and activity at this iron age hillfort, working closely with Dr Andy Wigley from Natural and Historic Environment Team and Oxford University Archaeology Department. The first official archaeological dig revealed well preserved features of 'national significance'. Oxford University will be continuing with the dig later in the year. A new interpretation package is being devised for the site in association with Chester and Shrewsbury Universities to include augmented technology as well as traditional interpretation panels. The first of these has already gone up and is giving people an idea of what the site would have been like 2000 years ago. We intend to work closely with Museums on this in future.

4.40 Southern parks and countryside heritage sites

Severn Valley Country Park re-development

The Visitor Centre has benefitted from a £500k extension (funded through the EARDF). The new building opened in September 2019 and now has a dedicated visitor welcome and interpretation area with extensive displays and interactive features showing visitors the incredible history and wildlife of the park. The new and improved Kestrel Café has now also opened under management of Shire Services. Overall the team are now equipped to provide a top-quality visitor experience and help the park to move towards a self-funding model

4.41 Family Play Trail at Severn Valley Country Park

The new play trail opened in Summer 2019. This has been funded by the Unlocking the Severn project (a river conservation project). The new play trail cost around £90,000 and features bespoke wooden play equipment that is already proving extremely popular for families visiting the park

4.42 Severn Valley Lives in the Landscape project

This is a project being funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project officer has delivered some fantastic work delving into the heritage of Severn Valley Country Park and presenting these fascinating stories to visitors. Outcomes have included oral history, family archaeology, creating a new heritage walk with interpretation boards, archival research, working with local schools and volunteer training

4.43 Providing specialist services for Town and Parish Councils

Over recent years a number of funding agreements have been set up for managing parks and countryside sites in partnership with Town and Parish Councils. The Outdoor Partnerships Team have also been helping with management of Rectory Wood and Field on behalf of Church Stretton Town Council and, from April 2020, will also be helping with management of Coppice Leasowes LNR. The specialist services of the team are increasingly seen as a commercially valuable service.

4.44 Countryside Stewardship

A number of new stewardship agreements have been agreed with Natural England during 2019. At Lyth Hill Countryside Heritage Site, this has funded additional stock fencing to enable grazing to be extended across the site, with benefits to rare grassland plant communities.

4.45 Birchmeadow sports pitches

Staff from Outdoor Partnerships managed a £70,000 drainage scheme to improve playing conditions on 2 football pitches that were previously water-logged and not useable for much of the playing season. The project was delivered on time and in budget despite some issues on site. Through autumn/winter 2019, the local football clubs reported that the pitches on Birchmeadow Park are now some of the best in the county.

5.0 COMMUNICATIONS

- 5.1 The communications team have continued to develop over the past year with some key changes to the structure of the team proving beneficial, these are
- The formalisation of two “senior” comms officers to support specific areas of the authority.
 - The recruitment of two Media apprentices, who focus on graphic design, video production, photography and animation. These additions have transformed the authority’s media offerings, with teams now benefitting from a more comprehensive and timely media support service.
 - From late November 2019, comms manager Laura Pell went on maternity leave and Head of Technology Andrew Boxall agreed to support the comms team. During this change, the two senior comms officers jointly took on the comms manager role with two comms officers back-filling the seniors’ roles. This change has given all those involved an opportunity to work in a more senior role whilst recognising the complexity of recruiting someone into a specialist team for what is a relatively short period in maternity cover.
- 5.2 Developed a communications tool kit – this document is available for staff to benefit from advice on producing their own communications, attempting to empower them with a greater understanding of how good communications are produced.
- 5.3 The Communications Team were one of the first in the authority to benefit from cloud collaboration tools, in this instance Microsoft Teams and SharePoint. This tool is now a cornerstone of their working day with a number of virtual conversations taking place to coordinate the work being undertaken. Further to this, the “Communications and Marketing Support” Teams site which is open to anyone at the authority was created. This second teams site stores all the resources staff need to stay on brand and get help – such as PowerPoint, letter and document templates – simply search for the name to join the site.
- 5.4 Planner – another digital tool that is helping the team coordinate their efforts is the use of Microsoft planner. This digital Kanban board is providing a go-to location for details of campaigns and workload.
- 5.5 STP – working closely with the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin STP the team are able to collaborate on County wide communications projects and campaigns – this has been particularly important with the floods and most notably Covid-19.
- 5.6 The ‘proud to make a difference’ campaign was launched last year as part of a drive to highlight the council’s successes, and to use real staff members in the council’s communications - to stress that council services are provided by real, often local, people and to help show the human side of the council. The campaign has since been reviewed, and revised/refreshed ‘proud to make a difference’ artwork will be rolled out internally and externally once the

coronavirus response ends. This artwork will make much greater use of staff members to highlight the many and varied roles carried out by council officers, and to raise awareness of the council's numerous achievements. A number of officers have already been photographed and these photographs will be central to the campaign. The 'proud to make a difference' strapline will also be widely used, including on bin lorries, social media and more.

- 5.7 New newsroom – in late 2019 the newsroom website was re-created with a fresher, more branded and search engine friendly design. This evolution is in line with web standards and delivers accessibility with elegance alongside simplicity.
- 5.8 Instagram – a new addition to the Council's Social Media accounts Shropshire's Instagram account offers a different perspective to the other channels. As Instagram is media based and, generally, for a younger audience – the approach has been a much softer, more interactive, brighter authority – with pictures and stories of people. This has been, in many ways, in preparation for the authorities change to a person-centred approach to all communications.
- 5.9 To bring an element of branding and recognition to the authority's videos and animations, a style guide has been developed detailing the specific types of shot, framing, text and other key components should be used.
- 5.10 Social Media – the authority benefits from the use of social media and those involved work hard to provide quality information in the correct format. As of early April, the number of twitter followers stands at 24K, over 17K people follow the Facebook page and the Instagram account has over 200 followers (it's less than eight months old and still in development).
- 5.11 Social Media statistics between April 2019 – March 2020
 - Total twitter reach: 14.4M
 - Total Facebook reach: 1.09M

Referrals from social media to website:

- Facebook, 59,5422
 - Twitter, 43,300
- 5.12 Visits to the website April 2019 – March 2020: visits = 2,027,770 (+862,654 on previous year). This increase in visitors is an excellent sign that we continue to improve access to information for residents. It should be noted that this is likely higher than it will (hopefully) be next year as we had the floods and are now in a pandemic but it's still an excellent achievement.
- 5.13 Visits to newsroom April 2019 – March 2020: visits = 1,355,700 (previous year = 633,084). As with visits to the website, this significant increase demonstrates that our newsroom is a used source of information. It should be noted that this is likely higher than it will (hopefully) be next year as we had the floods and are now in a pandemic but it's still an excellent achievement.

- 5.14 Flooding – as with many teams, communications were a key component in the authority's response to the flooding of 2020, with staff working long hours to make sure that the messages were getting out to the public.
- 5.15 As part of the response to Covid-19 some external support has been engaged to provide a local, expert perspective on the communications produced.
- 5.16 A communications Dashboard, as in a digitised series of live reports demonstrating specific points, are being introduced to those who require current information on the communications of the Council. At present, these include details of all the articles featured in the news with details of whether they were deemed positive, negative or neutral, it also features a similar rating for comments when they are available. In June 2020 details of web site visits were added, with plans for social media and call centre stats to be added in July.
- 5.17 A new social media management tool is being implemented to support the authority with a more interactive use of Social Media. External support has also been instigated to study and support the authority with its ever-expanding use of social media and other interactive communications tools.
- 5.18 The Councillors portal has been implemented and introduced for members to have a single place to access their digital worlds. In June 2020, this was updated to include a news section for updates to be issued to members. The tool is Sharepoint based and offers categorisation of news with templated styles for ease of navigation and use.
- 5.19 The comms team have been working with a local specialist in media and communications, receiving a few hours support each week. This support sees a monthly review of the work, the following is an extract from the May review:
- “In the current climate, with the ever-changing Government guidelines, and the challenge of so many people working from home, I feel that the output of the council's comms team during May has been creditable.”*
- 5.20 A new communications officer will be recruited in June 2020 with interviews taking place towards the end of the month. This position will likely work with the place directorate with a specific remit to support economic growth.
- 5.21 Covid-19 has seriously impacted the communications team and requirement on the authority to communicate. Additional requirements and opportunities have included:
- 5.21.1 Support with regular Chief Exec updates, initially daily, then three times a week and presently twice a week;
 - 5.21.2 Weekday updates for members – predominantly with updates from Public Health England (PHE);
 - 5.21.3 Communicating key messages from PHE and our own PH department;
 - 5.21.4 Attendance at several meetings relating to the situation within SC and beyond, such as meetings with other partner organisations;

- 5.21.5 Closer working with the local media as Covid-19 is, in many ways, a common cause in terms of sharing relevant information with residents and businesses;
- 5.21.6 An increase in staffing has been identified as a requirement with PH funding a further post in early July (recruitment taking place during the production of this document).

6.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 6.1 This report identifies several issues across a wide and diverse areas, each one of these areas has a reputational and financial risk to the council and the wider communities across Shropshire. As this report is a retrospective update of key issues and aspects of work there is minimal risk to consider.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8.0 Climate Change Appraisal

- 8.1 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

9.0 Background

- 9.1 The Portfolio Holder is responsible for key services of the Council, i.e. the 25-year PFI waste contract with Veolia that impacts upon every household and potential business within Shropshire, Leisure services across leisure centres, sports centres and cultural settings provides important cultural services for residents and tourists across the county.

10.0 Conclusions

- 10.1 This report identifies the varied and complex scope of works that are the responsibility of the Portfolio Holder.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Previous report of the Portfolio Holder

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/documents/s19371/Portfolio%20Report%20-%20Culture%20Leisure%2026.07.18.pdf>

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
Lezley Picton
Appendices
None